

# ED349774 1992-08-00 Visual Impairments. ERIC Digest #E511.

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## Visual Impairments. ERIC Digest #E511.

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WHAT IS MEANT BY VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS?

For legal and administrative purposes, the following definitions are used:



\* Legally blind: Central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with correction,

or, if greater than 20/200, a field of vision no greater than 20 degrees at the widest diameter.



\* Partially sighted: Central visual acuity between 20/70 and 20/200 in the better eye correction.

For functional educational purposes these definitions are used:



\* Visually handicapped: Requires special educational provisions because of visual problems (Barraga & Erin 1991).



\* Blind: Has either no vision or, at most, light perception (Barraga & Erin 1991). Students learn through the use of braille or related media without the use of vision.



\* Low vision: Has severe visual impairment after correction but visual function can be increased through the use of optical aids and environmental modifications (Corn & Ryser, 1989). Students with low vision learn from vision and other senses. Functional vision will depend on factors such as lighting, use of optical aids and devices, tasks, and personal characteristics. Modifications in lighting, size of print or objects, and distance may be required.

Common visual impairments include refractive errors that affect visual acuity such as myopia, hyperopia, and astigmatism; cataracts; visual field defects; accommodative difficulties; forms of muscle imbalances resulting in impaired binocular vision; and cortical visual impairment.

## WHAT ARE SOME TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH VISUAL

IMPAIRMENTS? The degree to which visual impairments affect development depends on the type of visual loss, severity, age of onset, intellectual ability, and environmental experiences. The lack of vision or reduced vision may result in delays or limitations in motor, cognitive, and social development. Without visual input, an infant may not be motivated to reach and move toward interesting objects in the environment. As soon as the infant with a visual impairment finds it exciting to hear sounds, he or she will begin

to reach and move toward the objects in the environment that make sound. This does not occur until several months later, since hearing sounds does not motivate movement toward objects as soon as seeing objects does.

Cognitively, the child who has a visual impairment cannot perceive objects in the environment beyond his or her grasp, including those that are too large or too small or are moving. While use of other senses enables the child to obtain information about the environment, a cognitive limitation does exist in the range and variety of experiences.

Socially, a child with a visual impairment is limited in interaction with the environment. The child cannot see the facial expressions of parents, teachers, and peers; cannot model social behaviors through imitation; and sometimes is unaware of the presence of others unless a sound is made. While touch provides direct information, it is often socially unacceptable. The older child is limited in the ability to orient to environmental cues and travel freely.

## WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS?

Academically oriented students with visual impairments have been mainstreamed successfully into regular classes for many years. They receive instruction from specially trained teachers in the additional skills necessary to increase independence. The unique curriculum for students who are blind includes reading and writing through the use of braille, listening skills, personal-social and daily living skills, orientation and mobility, career education, and instruction in the use of special aids and equipment. In addition to these areas, students with low vision and visual limitations may need instruction in the efficient use of vision and in the use of optical aids and alternative learning materials. A high proportion of students with visual impairments have additional disabilities and may require a curriculum that emphasizes functional living skills and communication skills.

Educational settings and services for children with visual impairments vary according to individual needs. Self-contained classrooms, residential schools, or regular classrooms with or without special assistance may be appropriate options for individual students.

## RESOURCES

American Council of the Blind



1155 15th Street, NW, Suite 720



Washington, DC 20005



202/467-5081 or 800/424-8666



Publishes: The Braille Forum

American Foundation for the Blind



15 West 16th Street



New York, NY 10011



212/620-2000 or 800/232-5463



Publishes: Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness



Directory of Agencies Serving Visually Handicapped in the U.S.



Ferrell, K. (1984). Parenting Preschoolers: Suggestions for Raising Young Blind and Visually Impaired Children



Ferrell, K. (1985). Reach Out and Teach



Hazenkamp, J., & Huebner, K. M. (1989). Program Planning and Evaluation for Blind

and Visually Impaired Students: National Guidelines for Excellence



Martinez, I., & Corn, A. (1990). When You Have a Visually Handicapped Child in Your Classroom: Suggestions for Teachers



Scholl, G. (Ed.). (1986). Foundations of Education for Blind and Visually Handicapped Children and Youth

American Printing House for the Blind



1839 Frankfort Avenue



P.O. Box 6085



Louisville, KY 40206



592/895-2405

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AERBVI)



206 North Washington Street, Suite 320



Alexandria, VA 22314



703/548-1884



Publishes: RE:view

Blind Children's Center



4120 Marathon Street



Los Angeles, CA 90029



213/664-2153



Informational booklets:



\* Dancing Cheek to Cheek, interactive communication



\* Heart to Heart, family experiences



\* Learning to Play, play activities



\* Move It, early motor development (ED 150 790)



\* Move with Me, physical activities



\* Talk to Me I, language development



\* Talk to Me II, language development (ED 261 490)

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind



1931 Bayview Avenue



Toronto, Ontario



Canada, M4G 4C8



416/480-7580

Division for the Visually Handicapped



The Council for Exceptional Children



1920 Association Drive



Reston, VA 22091



703/620-3660

International Institute for Visually Impaired



c/o Blind Children's Fund



144 Hancock Street



Auburndale, MA 02166

National Association for the Visually Handicapped



3201 Balboa Street



San Francisco, CA 94121



415/221-3201

National Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired



2180 Linway Drive



Beloit, WI 53511



608/362-1380 or 800/562-6265

National Coalition for Deaf-Blindness



c/o Perkins School for the Blind





175 North Beacon Street



Watertown, MA 02172



617/972-7220

National Federation of the Blind



1800 Johnson Street



Baltimore, MD 21230



410/659-9314



Publishes: Braille Monitor (Monthly) -- in print, cassette, or disc Future Reflections (Quarterly)



Willoughby, D. (1979). A Resource Guide for Parents and Educators of Blind Children

Library of Congress



National Library Service



Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped



1291 Taylor Street, NW



Washington, DC 20542



202/707-5100 or 800/424-9100

Recording for the Blind, Inc.



20 Roszel Road



Princeton, NJ 08540



609/452-0606

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Corn, A., & Ryser, G. (1989). Access to print for students with low vision. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 3(7), 340-349.

ERIC/OSEP Special Project. (1987). Orientation and mobility for blind infants. (Research and Resources in Special Education No. XIII.) The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091 (ED 298 680).

Martin, G. J., & Hoben, M. (1977). Supporting visually impaired students in the mainstream. (ED 145 609).

Rogow, S. (1988). Helping the visually impaired child with developmental problems: Effective practice in home, school, and community. New York: Teachers College Press.

Scholl, G. T. (1980). Self study and evaluation guide for day school programs for

visually handicapped pupils: A guide for program improvement. (ED 192 483).

ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) References In the references above, ED numbers refer to ERIC documents, which are usually accessible on microfiche at a local ERIC provider. Paper copies may be ordered by contacting the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. Phone: 800/443-ERIC, 703/440-1400.

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